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The Battle of Dienbienphu

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BOOKS

Roy, Jules. *The Battle of Dienbienphu*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965. 344 p.

There have been several previous accounts of the tragedy which befell members of the French Expeditionary Force at Dienbienphu. Mr. Roy has now added another to the list. While many of the facts of this battle may be redundant to the serious student of the French military campaign in Indochina, this version, based on personal interviews with both French and Vietminh personnel involved in this operation, research of military archives, and the author's intimate knowledge of the area, is written with authority. Credit for individual leadership, bravery, and brilliant tactical judgment is tempered by recognition of blundering strategic concepts, professional jealousies, and criminal disregard for the capabilities of the Vietminh. The author admits that he was tempted to describe this military episode as an honorable defeat. However, out of respect for the truth and for those who perished at Dienbienphu, and because many of the principal characters of this debacle are still alive, Mr. Roy felt obligated to record the facts as research revealed them. This is done in a day-to-day narrative which begins with General Navarre's assumption of military command of the Indochina Theater on through to the final defeat of General Castries in the "chamber pot" at the northeast gateway to Laos. Admittedly not in sympathy with French political objectives in Indochina, Mr. Roy, nevertheless, has attempted to record objectively the political and military factors which precipitated this ill-conceived venture--luring the Vietminh to battle in a location for which French logistic support could be only marginally provided by air resupply that was at the mercy of meteorological uncertainties. General Navarre's judgment, and to a lesser extent that of his deputy in the Tonkin area, General Cogny, was degraded by underestimating the enemy's capabilities. Neither credited General Giap with the capacity and resources to achieve mobility or maintain logistic support over long and difficult lines of communication in the face of even limited French air control. Although suffering from the lack of a detailed map, this interesting and straightforward account of the Dienbienphu Battle affords an insight into the present logistic capabilities of Communist forces in Southeast Asia.

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